

**Abstract:**

The paper is an attempt to know the answer of certain questions like: Are all religions governed by the same ethics? What is the difference between the morals and etiquettes of a Muslim, a Christian and a Jew? Do all religions share the same universal ethics or do they act differently in showing generosity towards others. Is there any commonality which joins them together? The paper focusses on the different ways of approaching a religion and emphasizes the need to understand the pluralistic world in terms of ethics. In the 21st era of globalization and immigration, the growing diversity is posing a great challenge to unity. So there is a dire need to look forward for the values to be imbibed to manage religious differences and live together as a common humanity in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The paper tries to address those challenges by bringing forth the bright side of contemporary pluralistic society and urges the need to build a society based on cosmopolitan ethics by sharing the common moral grounds. There is a great role of ethics in the integration of pluralistic society which lead us to the same goal. A pluralistic society governs all type of ethics... meta, normative as well as applied and governs one to live and survive in a rich diverse society keeping intact his religious differences.

Key Words: Abraham, Christian Ethics, Global Ethics, Islamic Ethics & Jewish Ethics

1. Introduction:

What is Ethics and how is it different from Morality. Many times we use both the terms synonymously but the two are quite different. Ethics refers to the rules provided by an external source whereas morals refer to an individual's own principles regarding right and wrong. Morality is about living, and as long as we continue living, we will inevitably be confronted with moral questions—and if we choose to stop living, that too is a moral issue. There has always been a debate among philosophers whether source of ethics is religion or not? Ethics is not confined to an individual but the whole society. It starts from the respect of creation and reform for the better by resisting human nature against disturbing the nature of the world. Sometimes the thing which is legally accepted becomes unacceptable from ethical point of view and also what is acceptable to one religion may be ethically unacceptable to others. The final goal of being ethical is not only to choose between right and wrong but acting in the right direction. Tariq Ramadan says, "The fragmentation of knowledge is deep within our traditions and therefore ethics connect us to the fundamental worldview. The world is in crisis not because of moral issues but failure of system in itself. We have lost the semantics of the world by changing not only the scripture but also the creation. We should reconcile all the moral systems together because day by day we are losing one or the other."

There are many approaches to a religion in a multi-religious and co-existent society. Out of them, the Pluralistic approach is the best one. Pluralism does not mean to lose one's identity but to gain consciousness of other soul mates. Our morals should be attractive enough to attract others and understanding of one another. Pluralism is not simply relativism, but makes room for real commitment. In the public square or in the interfaith council, commitments are not left at the door. On the contrary, the encounter of a multicultural society must be the encounter of commitments, the encounter of each other with all our particularities and angularities.¹ A pluralist ethic is not merely an ideal destination for societies and states. It is about constant striving in every quarter, from schools and corporations to faith communities and law enforcement, to bridge the empathy gaps and ignorance gaps.²

All the three monotheistic religions-Judaism, Islam and Christianity have their roots in the Middle East and recognize Abraham as their first Prophet. All of the Abrahamic religions claim to have a moral superiority on what is right and wrong not only at a local level, but at a global level as well. They also lay emphasis on the concepts of "equality, justice, compassion, freedom of consciousness and human rights and dignity" A love of humanity and the stranger is a key value in the Abrahamic tradition. He did indeed become "the father of a multitude of nations," permanently transforming the world with the revolutionary ideas of ethical monotheism, social justice, brotherhood of man, love of the stranger, and compassion for the weak. Abraham was the first to link individual belief and worship in the one God to social values and responsibilities. The ethical principles of monotheism recognize "that there is one Creative Source of the one creation, but this very unity conveys a moral imperative concerning ethical treatment and conduct" in creation itself.³

The core teaching of all the religions is based on love and the difference is due to our lack of knowledge about each other. The Torah as well as the Quran teaches us the same brotherhood.⁴

2. Jewish Ethics:

One faith that holds more of a mixed bag than any other on the world's stage, when it comes to ethics and morality, is Judaism. The reason behind this is the amount of ethical questions that the Jewish people have been involved in the last 75 years or so. The first that comes to mind, of course, is the Holocaust, a horrendous extermination against at least six million European Jews that was carried out by Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and Nazi Germany during World War II. At the same time, many people view the Jewish nation of Israel as an apartheid state, occupying, in part, lands belonging to the Palestine state. However, one of the positive views of local Jewish ethics and morality is the one that shows that the Jewish people recognize the hardships of their past and are willing to work to see that other people, regardless of race, colour, creed, orientation or tribe do not have to suffer some of the same harshness they were forced to.⁵

Judaism is the oldest of the three major monotheistic religions in the western world. Their root is in the 2nd millennium and was codified into the Mosaic Law around 400 BCE. There are three main branches of contemporary Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. There are also mystical and humanistic forms of Judaism that are relatively minor.⁶

Jewish Ethics come from the Written Law — the Torah, which comes from God, and from the Oral Law, the Talmud and the Midrash, which is the word of God as interpreted by the Rabbis. Study and practice of these ethical principles not only constitute individual worship, but lead to the establishment of just social systems and the promotion of the common good. These form the basic moral guidelines and ethical parameters of how Jews are commanded to treat others.

The Hebrew Prophets and Talmudic Rabbis have made clear that while commandments between individuals and God are extremely important, God commanded that ethical behaviour towards one another is of greater importance and concern. King Solomon asserted that “To do righteousness and justice is preferred by God above sacrifice.”⁷

Judaism is pre-eminently relationship-oriented, focusing on the relationship between God and humanity, God and the Jewish community, and social relationships. Rabbi Akiva famously observed that the greatest principle in Torah is to “Love your neighbour as yourself.”⁸ Famous scholar Hillel added to this by summarizing all of Judaism in the sentence: “What is hateful to you, do not do to others,” adding that “the rest is commentary. Now go and study.”⁹ The understanding is that Torah is an explication of the manner of living an ethical life. The “ethical life” in Judaism is celebrated as a source of *simhah*, which Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes as “the happiness we share,” or “the happiness we make by sharing.”¹⁰

Rabbi Emanuel Rackman observed that Judaism teaches a “special kind of justice”, an *empathic justice*, which “...seeks to make people identify with each another – with each other’s needs, with each other’s hopes and aspirations, with each other’s defeats and transformations.” Because Jews have known the distress of slaves and the loneliness of strangers, we are to project ourselves into their souls and make their plight our own.

Jewish people believe that God is actively involved in the righting of wrongs and intervening in history: “The Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.”¹¹ God is also mindful of his covenantal relationship with the people of Israel.¹²

The Hebrew Prophets throughout history have proclaimed that authentic worship of God cannot coexist with the perpetration of injustice or unethical treatment of others. Abraham also provides a paradigmatic model for compassion and acts of loving kindness in his overriding concern for the welfare and well-being of others. Abraham’s compassion is demonstrated by his hospitality to strangers despite his own discomfort. Judaism believes in *chesed* love which means to practice acts of mercy, kindness and compassion, even when it may not be convenient. As God has dealt with us in mercy, so we should deal with others.

"Show mercy and compassion, every one to your neighbor."¹³

And walk humbly with your God.¹⁴

There are Eleven Core Jewish values which include:

Tikkun Olam : The concept of *tikkun olam*, literally "repair of the world," has come to stand for the Jewish commitment to make the world more merciful. Their mission is to help repair desperate spirits and to share whatever God has given them with those less fortunate.

Tzedakah involves both justice and righteousness. It states "Seek justice and relieve the oppressed."¹⁵ Our notion of the infinite worth of human life stems from the fact that all people are created "in the image of God." Therefore, each individual is deserving of respect as a unique creation of the Divine.

Jewish tradition has always demanded good citizenship, which requires following fair laws and showing regard for the decision-making process of the community in which they live.

"The law of the state is the law."¹⁶ However, this does not demand blind obedience to the community's laws where they are in conflict with other ethical values.

Judaism does not say, 'Thou shall believe' but 'Thou shall do.'" (Moses Mendelssohn)

"Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor."¹⁷

Ethical people accept responsibility for their decisions and set an example for others. One is responsible whether the act is intentional or inadvertent.¹⁸

The Hebrew original of the Ten Commandments says LO TIRTZACH, which means You Shall Not Murder. Killing is justified when it is for self-defense. The Talmud teaches: “If someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first.” Modern Jewish theology would clearly take a very different view about warfare, seeing it as justifiable only as a means of self-defence, or as a way to protect people who were being attacked by an oppressor.¹⁹

3. Christian Ethics:

Christianity consists of a countless number of branches, churches and denominations. While there are churches that are centralized and have a well-developed approach of ethical questions, others are decentralized and rely upon individual interpretation. For Christians the source of all ethics is the Bible and, most particularly, the teaching of Jesus Christ. There is a marriage between the Biblical revelation and ethics.²⁰

Like Jews, Christians believe that humankind was created in the image of God. Christianity shares the Abrahamic ethic of human equality, since all of humanity is created in the same image, descended from Adam, all are fallen and in need of salvation through faith, and God loves all among his creation equally. The Abrahamic vision of spiritual liberty is understood by the moral choice given to individuals to accept or reject faith in Christ and to repent and atone for wrong-doing.²¹

For a Christian, the key for being a good person is to live in a community with others and share the basic level of humanness with others. As Christians they also promise to live moral lives in their vows at baptism. In the baptismal vows of the Episcopal Church in the United States, for example, they pledge to persevere in resisting evil, and pledge to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving their neighbours as themselves, and strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

Christianity inherited Judaism’s concern for the individual relationship with God and the importance of manifesting that love in relations with others. When Jesus was asked which of God’s commandments was most important, Mark records Jesus’ response: “The most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all

your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind and with all your strength.”²² He then added: “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”²³

Elaborating on Biblical ethics, Jesus proclaims that “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”²⁴ Like Judaism, Jesus asks believers to love all others as God loves creation: God sends sunshine and rain on the good as well as the bad.²⁵ God does not distinguish among his creation, nor should his believers. Conversely, wrong beliefs lead to bad actions.²⁶ Also, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”²⁷ Correcting one’s inner beliefs and purifying the heart, then, is the first task for Christians in order to be reconciled with God and with each other.

John writes we love because He first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”²⁸

Early Christians used the term *agape* to mean “Christian love”, the kind of self sacrificing love of God for humanity that Christ exemplified. In many Bible translations, *agape* is translated as charity (from the Latin *caritas*).²⁹

John records Jesus as proclaiming, “This is my commandment, “and that you love one another as I have loved you”. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”³⁰ Jesus’ subsequent death on the cross represents for Christians the ultimate act of compassion and love. Paul writes that “God proves his love for us in that “while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”³¹ According to 1 John: We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.³²

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Paul talks at length about brotherly love³³ and its significance to the community.³⁴ As a divine gift, *agape* “appears to be a dynamic force that is conterminous with the presence of the Spirit of God, engendering the practical realities that make harmonious communal life possible.”³⁵

Brotherly love becomes the litmus test for the follower of Christ: “By this all will know that you are my disciples... if you have love for one another.”³⁶

Thangaraj writes that the “human response to God’s love is expressed not only through one’s love of God with one’s entire being; it is primarily expressed through the love of neighbor.”³⁷

For Paul, love is not only a theological concept but also an ethical prescription preventing corrosion of early Christian communities in times of communal discord and bickering.³⁸ For Paul, those who live in God’s Spirit by baptism are enabled in their capacity to love fully.³⁹

The Bible says, “Love one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it...”⁴⁰ This love of Christians went so far as to emphasize the love for enemies and praying for persecutors to be perfect as that of heavenly father.⁴¹ The Bible says; “... love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”⁴²

Jesus undertook “transforming initiatives” to respond to violence. He said, “... Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”⁴³

Paul’s twelfth letter to the Romans has a number of ethical verses expounding on the manner of living a pious life that is “holy and acceptable to God” based on Jesus’ teachings.⁴⁴ These include: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them”⁴⁵, and “Do not repay anyone evil for evil”⁴⁶ and “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all”.⁴⁷ Paul concludes: Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁴⁸

Christianity teaches that God chose to send Jesus as a mercy to humankind. In fulfilling God’s will⁴⁹ and in forgiving others, Jesus provides Christians with the ultimate example of the transformation of evil into good. Jesus’ actions and principles of nonviolence were a source of inspiration and empowerment for early Christians. In particular, Christians drew from Jesus’ remark to Simon Peter, who rushed to defend him and he was being arrested: “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”⁵⁰ Jesus enjoined his followers not to harm those who harm them:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”⁵¹

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”⁵²

Matthew⁵³ asks Christians to “forgive your brother from your heart” if they are to receive the blessings of God’s forgiveness and find peace. Humility was essential for Christians living in community.⁵⁴ To early Christians, Peter wrote, “All of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

Speaking to social ethics and universal compassion, Jesus warned against self righteousness in judging others. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.”⁵⁵

If all are sinners, Christians are then asked to not only be humble, love others and refrain from passing judgment, but also to be merciful with the struggles of others. Matthew ⁵⁶records Jesus as saying “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”⁵⁷

4. Islamic Ethics:

Muslims understand their faith as *din al-fitrah* (natural religiousness), which at its purest level is in a state of instinctual and natural surrender to God.⁵⁸ Therefore, Muslim Ethics starts with God and ends with God. The primary sources of Islamic ethics are the Quran and the prophet Muhammad(s). The Quran says that every religious community in the world is the ummah of one or the other prophet as God has completed his responsibility by sending forth his message to all the human beings through his 1, 24000 prophets.⁵⁹

In Islam, social justice is rooted in a strong underlying egalitarian ethic, based on the Qur’anic principle that for God, the only differentiation among creation is in piety (*taqwa*) or righteousness (*birr*). Allah says in the Qur’an:

You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.⁶⁰

“And establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing.”⁶¹

The Qur’an makes it equally clear that the practice of justice is as important with those with whom one is estranged or in conflict with:

“O you who believe, Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.”⁶²

Regarding Diversity, the Qur’an explains:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).”⁶³

“Had God willed, He would have made you into one community (*ummah*); but [it was His will] to test you in what He gave you. So compete with each other in doing good works. To God you are all returning, and He will inform you about how you differed.”⁶⁴

Islam is not a religion of coercion and the Quran says “The Truth is from your Lord; so let whoever wills, believe, and let whoever wills, disbelieve.”⁶⁵

This freedom of thought in matters of ultimate belief not only underscores human choice, reason and dignity in Islam, but also forms the basis for diversity, pluralism and tolerance in Islam – essential building blocks for a just and peaceful society.

The Qur’an states that God sent out different prophets to different people at different times to reveal the same truth of the oneness of God and of individual moral accountability.⁶⁶

About Prophet Muhammad, the Quran says:

“And indeed, you are of a great moral character.”⁶⁷

And the Prophet Muhammad (s) himself says:

“I have been sent to perfect good character.”⁶⁸

Safwan reported from a number of Companions of the Messenger of Allah(s) on the authority of their fathers who were relatives of each other. The Muhammad(s) said: Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes his right, or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment.⁶⁹ The last sermon of Muhammad reads, “All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; white has no superiority over black, nor does a black have any superiority over white; [none have superiority over another] except by piety and good action.”⁷⁰

The Quran also emphasises that such differences do not suggest that their origin is different, rather it emphasises that human beings have a common spirituality and morality.⁷¹ The differences exist because God has given human beings the freedom to choose: “And had your Lord so willed, all those who live on earth would have believed to faith altogether: would you force people against their will to believe!”⁷²

Help one another in benevolence and piety, and help not one another in sin and transgression”⁷³

“Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture? Then will you not reason?”⁷⁴

5. Global Ethics:

“Global ethics,” helps in identifying “a rather unique set of moral problems that either cut across national boundaries or at least are shared by diverse peoples and communities despite their different geographical locations,” that is, extracting “reasonable parameters” that can apply globally and which are “grounded in a moral vision of human dignity, personal and social responsibility, and justice.”⁷⁵

Dalai Lama talks about a universal approach to ethics, to have a clear understanding of what unites us all, our common humanity. He says, “Since we are social animals-that is, since our survival and flourishing depend on being part of a group or community -our capacity for empathy has profound implications for our pursuit of happiness and well-being. Most of the problems we face in the world today-such as armed conflict, poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation-have arisen and are maintained by complex human activity. Furthermore, most persistent sources of inner suffering at an individual level-fear, anxieties, and stress, for example-are also closely connected to our mental complexity and our excitable imaginations. He points out that the factors which divide us are actually much more superficial than those we share. Despite all the characteristics that differentiate us-race, language, religion, gender, wealth, and many others-we are all equal in terms of our basic humanity. And this equality is corroborated by science. The sequencing of the human genome, for example, has shown that racial differences constitute only a tiny fraction of our genetic makeup, the vast majority of which is shared by all of us. In fact, at the genome level,

the differences between individuals appear more pronounced than those between different races.⁷⁶ He further says, "Compassion reduces our fear, boosts our confidence, and brings us inner strength. By reducing distrust, it opens us to others and brings us a sense of connection with them and a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Compassion also gives us respite from our own difficulties. The observation that our concern for others contributes to our own well-being is also supported by scientific research. There is now increasing scientific evidence that love, kindness, trust, and so on have not only psychological benefits but also observable benefits to physical health. I know of one recent study showing that the deliberate cultivation of love and compassion can even affect our DNA itself. An impact has been observed on the parts of our DNA known as telomeres, which are associated by medical science with the process of aging."⁷⁷ He gives the examples of some of the greatest fighters like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Václav Havel, and others who have been motivated by universal compassion and says that one could not describe such people as meek or retiring just because they combined their devotion to the welfare of others with a commitment to nonviolence.⁷⁸ At the heart of a democratic ethic is a commitment to genuine dialogue ... a readiness to give and take, to listen, to bridge the empathy gaps as well as the ignorance gaps that have so often impeded human progress. It implies a pluralistic readiness to welcome diversity and to see our differences not as difficult burdens but as potential blessings."⁷⁹

6. Conclusion:

After a comparative study of ethics of all the Abrahamic religions –Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is clear that all have descended from the same source Abraham and preach the same ethical teachings of justice, fraternity, liberty, love, tolerance and brotherhood on which is based our Universal ethics or Global ethics or some might call it Secular ethics. The Global ethics propounded by Dalai Lama is itself based on the core teachings of Buddhism which is related with the core principles of other religions as well. Living in a world of diversity which threatens us day by day more so because of immigration and globalisation have lead us to ethical crisis. I believe if everyone follows the core teachings of his religion with Tolerance, Dialogue and finally Pluralism, we can go a long way in not just eradicating differences of each other but living within these differences to learn from each other. The ethics applied in a Pluralistic society should add to the goodness of the society because all religious ethics speak the same language. We should try to draw out the common good out of these differences and being able to receive its positive end. Martin Smith rightly says, "Perhaps we should look at what we, as human beings, have in common, and use this common ground to figure out what is ethical for all, what is just for all, and what the best thing for the entire human race is. Only then, do I feel that global ethics can be achieved." Global ethics would bring global justice which ultimately would bring human solidarity and global peace.

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